

*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

**January, 14, 2009**

**THIS WEEK: Willson Alexander Scott, donator of land for Iowa State Capitol**

**BACKGROUND:** The following information is based on an article from the *Annals of Iowa* Vol. XIII, No.4, April 1922, by Ida M. Huntington. Information was also provided by family descendent Matthew Scott, and the Polk County Auditor.

**PROLOGUE:** W.A. Scott and Harrison Lyon donated the land for the Iowa State Capitol. Of the ten acres donated, Scott owned about nine and a half acres, and Lyon owned the remainder on the northern edge.

W.A. Scott's grave is the only grave on the Iowa State Capitol grounds.



*Mr. and Mrs. Willson Alexander Scott*

**W**illson Alexander Scott arrived in Iowa in 1843. Along with his cousin John B. Scott, they provided farm products to the Dragoons occupying the “new” Fort Des Moines. The Fort was situated between the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers. The farmers and settlers were adjacent to the Fort on the east side of the Des Moines River. John B. and Willson A., known as Aleck, also traded with the Indians. They built a log trading post on the east side of the river. Aleck Scott went with the Indians when they were removed to Kansas. When the land in Iowa was opened for purchase in 1846, Aleck returned to Iowa and bought five hundred acres on the east side of the river. Here, Aleck built a double log cabin. John B. and Aleck were licensed to run the ferry across the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers. Aleck was involved in farming and ferrying, and records indicate by 1847, he was also beginning a career in building. The town of Fort Des Moines felt they should accrue some revenue from the ferries. An agreement was made that Mr. Scott should put in a float bridge connecting Sycamore on the east and Keokuk on the west (now Grand Avenue) This bridge was unsuccessful because it was too long when the river was low and too short when the river was high. He

later built the first trestle bridge over the Des Moines River at Market Street.

The city of Fort Des Moines was platted in July of 1846, bounded on the east by Water Street, the west by Eighth Street, the north by Locust, and the south by Elm. Scott and Dean's addition to Fort Des Moines' east side, seems to have been the first addition to the original plat. It was made on November 19, 1849. Surveying and selling the lots in this addition launched Aleck's real estate business. By this time, Aleck had married Luesa (sometimes spelled Louisa) Jayne. They had no children. Letters to family members talk of Aleck's two trips to California during the gold rush. On one trip, Luesa accompanied him.

In a letter to his family in October of 1855, Aleck describes his brick house near the river as "containing nine rooms and being two stories high with a cellar under it." Also mentioned in the letter is his intent to sell two or three hundred lots.

Scott was a member of a private organization in 1855. The purpose of this organization was to build the new Capitol. On January 30, 1856, Scott platted and filed the "Town of De Moine" all of which was on the east side of the river extending from the river on the west, east Twelfth Street on the east, Court Avenue on the north, and the river on the south. On June 3, 1856, he platted and filed "Scott's Addition," which included the present day site of the Capitol. The year 1857 found Aleck at the height of his prosperity. The Capitol had been relocated to Des Moines, and Aleck had helped pay for the move. Scott was elected to the city council's seventh ward. He also ran for state representative in the first legislature held in Des Moines in the "Old Brick Capitol" that he and other businessmen had paid for and built on land he had donated for that purpose. A relatively small number of votes defeated him.

Due to the economic decline in the late 1850s, Scott once again left for California hoping to improve his finances once he had reached Pike's Peak. But on June 23, 1859, at 2:15 a.m., Willson Alexander Scott died of cholera in Kearney City, Nebraska. He was buried there that day.

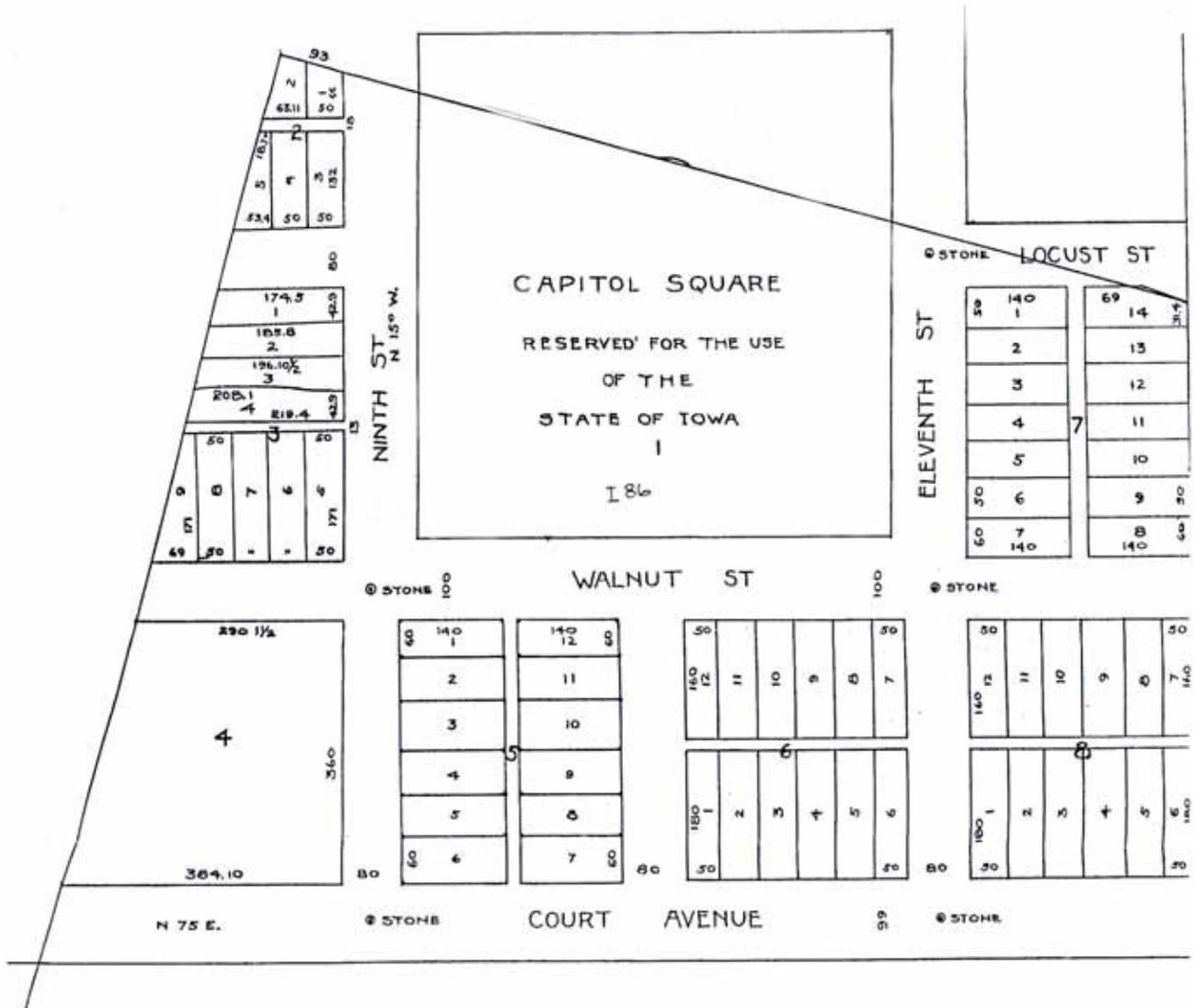
Aleck once expressed a wish to be buried near the spot where his double log cabin had been built, at the summit of the hill looking across the river valleys southward and westward. Friends recalled that wish and moved his remains from the grave near Fort Kearney to Des Moines on November 1, 1859. Aleck was a pioneer, farmer, trader, ferryman, traveler, builder, and businessman. He was forty-one years old when he died. His grave is south of the Judicial Building.

Please see plat map below.

# SCOTT'S ADDITION

TO THE TOWN OF

## DEMOINE



SCOTT'S ADDITION TO TOWN OF DEMOINE IS SITUATED IN SECTION 5 TOWNSHIP 78 NORTH OF RANGE 24 WEST OF THE 5TH P.M. POLK CO. IOWA. STONES ARE PLACED IN THE CENTRES OF THE STREET. THE SIZE OF LOTS ARE IN FEET AND INCHES. THE NUMBER OF BLOCKS ARE MARKED WITH RED FIGURES